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ABSTRACT

In both Gestalt therapy and Holland's theory of vocational choice, person-environment interaction receives considerable emphasis. Gestalt therapy theory suggests that people make contact (that is, meet needs) through a characteristic style of interacting with the environment. Holland identifies six personality types in his theory and asserts that persons of each type thrive in a corresponding environment. A correlational method was used to investigate whether particular Holland types use a characteristic style of contact to meet needs. A sample of 46 college graduate and undergraduate students responded to the Gestalt Personal Homeostasis Inventory (GPHI) and the Vocational Preference Inventory (VPI). The results revealed several significant associations between certain scores on both instruments, namely, that: (1) high VPI Realistic scores correlated with low GPHI Confluence scores; (2) VPI Investigative scale correlated negatively with GPHI Introjection and Confluence and positively with Awareness and Withdrawal/Closure; (3) VPI Conventional scale correlated negatively with GPHI Action; and (4) VPI Artistic scale correlated positively with GPHI Sensation and Excitement and negatively with Projection and Retroflection. The results encourage further research toward the goal of assimilating these two theoretical models into a comon conceptual framework. (13 references) (Author/NLA)

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Breaking Ground: A Study of Gestalt Therapy Theory and Holland's Theory of Vocational Choice

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Abstract

In both Gestalt therapy theory and in Holland's theory of vocational choice, person-environment interaction receives considerable emphasis. Gestalt therapy theory suggests that people make contact (i.e. meet needs) through a characteristic style of interacting with the environment. Holland identifies six personality types in his theory and asserts that persons of each type thrive in a corresponding environment. This study employed a correlational method to investigate whether particular Holland types use a characteristic style(s) of contact to meet needs. A sample of 46 college graduate and undergraduate students responded to the Gestalt Personal Homeostasis Inventory and the Vocational Preference Inventory. The results revealed several significant associations between scale scores of psychometric instruments derived from each theory. Moreover, the results encourage further research toward the goal of assimilating these two seemingly disparate theoretical models into a common conceptual framework.

Gestalt therapy remains a significant force in the field of counseling and psychotherapy (Clarkson, 1989; Simkin & Yontef, 1984). Similarly, John L. Holland's theory of vocational choice continues to be widely studied and applied in a variety of career counseling and research settings (Holland & Gottfredson, 1990). In both Gestalt therapy theory and in Holland's theory of vocational choice, person-environment interaction receives considerable emphasis. Gestalt therapy theory asserts that contactful (i.e. need-fulfilling) interactions with the environment promote individual psychological health (Polster & Polster, 1973). Holland proposes that career satisfaction and psychological health greatly depend on a congruent (i.e. compatible) match between person and environment (Holland, 1985). Further, Gestalt therapy theory suggests that people make contact (i.e. meet needs), or interrupt contact (i.e. thwart needs) through a characteristic style of interacting with the environment established through experience. Additionally, Holland identifies six personality types in his theory and asserts that persons of each type flourish in one of six corresponding environments. Moreover, Holland posits that, through heredity and experience, people develop a modal personal style of orienting to the environment. Together, both theoretical views propose that adaptive functioning depends on the individual's ability to interact with the environment to meet needs or satisfy demands. Each theoretical model also asserts that people implement a preferred, or characteristic style in coping with the demands of the environment and in satisfying emergent needs. The conceptual parallels between Gestalt therapy theory and Holland's theory of vocational choice prompt inquiry into whether they may be related. This study examined the possible relationship between these two

person-environment views.

Perls, Hefferline, & Goodman (1951) initially proposed and described styles of contact people use to meet needs. They also identified mechanisms by which people thwart needs and they termed these resistances. Others (Polster & Polster, 1973) further explicated these mechanisms which include six contact functions and six resistance functions. Woldt (1984) graphically illustrated the contact and resistance functions in Figure 1. This figure depicts the cyclical nature of the functions and represents the process by which individuals move through the stages of the cycle to meet needs or satisfy environmental demands. The six contact functions include: Sensation/Perception (orienting to internal needs/external demands), Awareness (imparting meaning to sensations), Excitement (preparing to meet needs/demands), Action (using resources), Full Contact (satisfying needs/demands), and Closure/Withdrawal (ending contact). The six resistance functions include: Desensitization (sensory disorientation), Introjection (uncritical acceptance of environmental input), Projection (disowning self/blaming), Retroflection (redirecting energy inward toward self), Deflection (avoiding interaction), and Confluence (dysfunctional prolonging of that which satisfies a need/demand). Individuals use contact and resistance mechanisms to maintain stability and balance between their needs and the demands of the environment. Gestalt therapy theory refers to this state of balance between person and environment as homeostasis. Individuals may also use contact and resistance mechanisms in non-healthy ways, thereby disrupting homeostasis, interrupting movement through the homeostasis cycle, and failing to meet needs. Although both contact and resistance mechanisms can aid or disrupt need

fulfillment, the contact functions primarily enable healthy functioning (contact), whereas the resistances primarily interrupt contact.

Insert Figure 1 About Here

Holland (1985) proposed that people and surroundings respectively comprise six personality types and six corresponding environments[1]. These include: Realistic (R), Investigative (I), Artistic (A), Social (S), Enterprising (E), and Conventional (C). Each personality type and corresponding environment retains distinguishing traits and characteristics. Moreover, Holland asserted that persons of a specified type will feel most comfortable in a corresponding environment. For example, Realistic types working in Realistic environments would experience maximum compatibility as their abilities and interests closely match the demands and opportunities of the environment. This compatibility, or fit, between type and environment Holland refers to as congruence.

Though seemingly disparate in terms of constructs, terminology and approach, Gestalt therapy homeostasis theory and Holland's theory of vocational choice appear interrelated. It seems reasonable to question whether particular Holland personality types use a characteristic style (or styles) of contacting the environment to meet needs. Research examining such a question proves scant, however. Therefore, the present study investigated the relationship, if any, between Gestalt therapy homeostasis theory and Holland's theory of vocational choice. As a pilot study, no hypotheses were formulated.

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[1]See Holland (1985) for a complete description of the types and environments.

Rather, three goals guided the study. These included: (1) to determine if significant correlations would emerge from pairings of psychometric instruments derived from each theory; (2) to generate hypotheses regarding the relationship between the two theories; and (3) to identify conceptual parallels between the theories and discuss implications for further research.

Method

Measures

The Vocational Preference Inventory (VPI) consists entirely of occupational titles (Holland, 1977). Respondents indicate their like, dislike, or indifference for each of 160 items. Once scored, results indicate the respondent's preference for Realistic, Investigative, Artistic, Social, Enterprising, and/or Conventional occupations. The VPI retains moderate to high reliability and validity (Holland, 1977).

The Gestalt Personal Homeostasis Inventory (GPHI; Martinek, 1985) assesses a respondent's style of interacting with the environment. The GPHI consists of 240 attitude and behavior statements yielding 12 scales which reflect the six contact and six resistance mechanisms posited in Gestalt therapy homeostasis theory. Mraz (1990) and Martinek (1985) examined the construct validity of the GPHI through factor analytic research. Others (Babyak, 1985; Dinkleman, 1985; Mraz, 1990) found support for the concurrent validity of the measure. Research efforts continue toward establishing validity and reliability data for the instrument.

Participants

Forty-six college graduate and undergraduate students, primarily enrolled in education courses, participated in the study. The 33 female and 13 male students ranged in age from 20 to 52 with an average of 33 years. These participants comprised a sample of convenience for the purpose of this pilot study.

Procedures

The data were collected in the fall semester of the academic year. The students received a data packet during their scheduled class periods and following their verbal agreement to participate. The packet included a GPHI, a VPI, a consent form, and a brief demographic questionnaire. Verbal instructions supported and clarified the nature of the study. Students responded to the measures and forms outside of class and returned them prior to the start of their regularly scheduled class periods the following week. GPHI answer sheets were scored by computer. VPI response sheets were scored manually.

Results and Discussion

Two-tailed analyses yielded significant Pearson product-moment coefficients between various GPHI and VPI scaled scores. As evident in Table 1, the Realistic, Investigative, Conventional, and Artistic scales of the VPI significantly correlated with certain GPHI contact and resistance scales. These results merit attention and prove useful in generating hypotheses concerning the relationship between particular Holland types and certain Gestalt contact/resistance styles.

Insert Table 1 About Here

The association between high VPI Realistic scores and low GPHI Confluence scores reached significance. Thus, Realistic types (described by Holland [1985] as hard headed and asocial) appear apt to meet needs through maintaining separateness between themselves and the environment, as suggested by a low score on Confluence.

The VPI Investigative scale significantly correlated in a negative direction with GPHI Introjection and Confluence, and in a positive direction with Awareness and Withdrawal/Closure. This suggests that Investigative types (described as analytical, critical, and intellectual) critically analyze and assess environmental input prior to assimilating or rejecting it, as reflected in low scores on Introjection. Also, Investigative types make contact via clearly defined person-environment boundaries, as reflected in low Confluence scores. Further, they effectively create meaning and make sense out of their experiences (high Awareness scores), and realize when a task or relationship ends and a need fulfilled (high Withdrawal/Closure scores).

The VPI Conventional scale correlated negatively with GPHI Action. Thus, Conventional types (described as careful, conforming, and inhibited) appear less apt to experience life as challenging or to use personal power to meet needs (low Action scores).

VPI Artistic correlated positively with the Sensation and Excitement scales of the GPHI, and negatively with the GPHI Projection and Retroflection scales. Artistic types (described as sensitive, emotional, and expressive) thus seem to make contact through tuning in to the environment (high Sensation scores) and feeling invigorated by their experiences (high Excitement scores). They also meet needs through externalizing their thoughts and feelings (low Projection scores) and acting less inhibitedly (low Retroflection scores).

Limitations

The results of the present study suggest some degree of relationship between the constructs measured by the VPI and the GPHI. The accidental sampling method of the study and its small sample size constrain these results, however. The lack of reliability and validity data regarding the GPHI further limits the generalizability of the results. Considering that many significant correlations emerged from a small sample (N=46), however, the outcome of this study provides encouragement for further research.

Conclusion

This study broke new ground for examining the relationship between Gestalt therapy theory and Holland's theory of vocational choice. It also charted a new course toward assimilating these two seemingly disparate person-environment models. The results of correlational analyses indicate the presence of some association between certain scaled scores of the GPHI and the VPI. These findings provide some empirical support for the

intuitive conceptual parallels between these two seemingly disparate person-environment models. Subsequent research utilizing more refined sampling methodology and a larger sample size may prove fruitful. Also, as the reliability and validity of the GPHI becomes more established, further investigations with this instrument may be enhanced. Given its powerful therapeutic potential, numerous possibilities exist for eventually using Gestalt therapy approaches in career counseling. Further research may well lead to a new mode of Gestalt career counseling.

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Table 1

Correlation Matrix for VPI Interest Scale Scores and GPHI Scale Scores

	CFLC	INTJ	DSNZ	PRJC	RTRF	DFLC
R	*-.3232	-.0872	.2528	.0052	-.2793	-.2253
I	*-.3169	*-.3637	.1579	-.1742	-.2096	-.2732
S	-.113	-.1709	.1936	-.2605	-.0901	-.1957
C	-.0795	.0775	-.0017	.1583	-.0068	.0140
E	-.2268	-.1280	-.0582	-.0253	-.0246	.0213
A	-.2968	-.0064	-.0745	*-.3078	*-.3181	-.0139

	SNST	AWRS	EXCT	ACTN	FC	WC
R	-.0376	.1964	.1745	.0399	.3004	.2791
I	-.0486	**.4422	.0937	.1231	.2137	*.3751
S	.0624	-.0537	.1165	-.1474	.2780	.2269
C	-.1130	-.0418	-.0132	*-.3022	-.0528	-.0164
E	.0985	.0689	.2498	-.0129	.1160	.2279
A	*.3168	.2809	*.3800	.1662	.1536	.2044

Two-tailed analyses. *p<.05, **p<.01

Legend: CFLC=Confluence, INTJ=Introjection, AWRS=Awareness, WC=Withdrawal/Closure, ACTN=Action, SNST=Sensation/Perception, PRJC=Projection, EXCT=Excitement, RTRF=Retroflection, DSNZ=Desensitization, DFLC=Deflection, FC=Full Contact; R=Realistic, I=Investigative, S=Social, C=Conventional, E=Enterprising, A=Artistic.

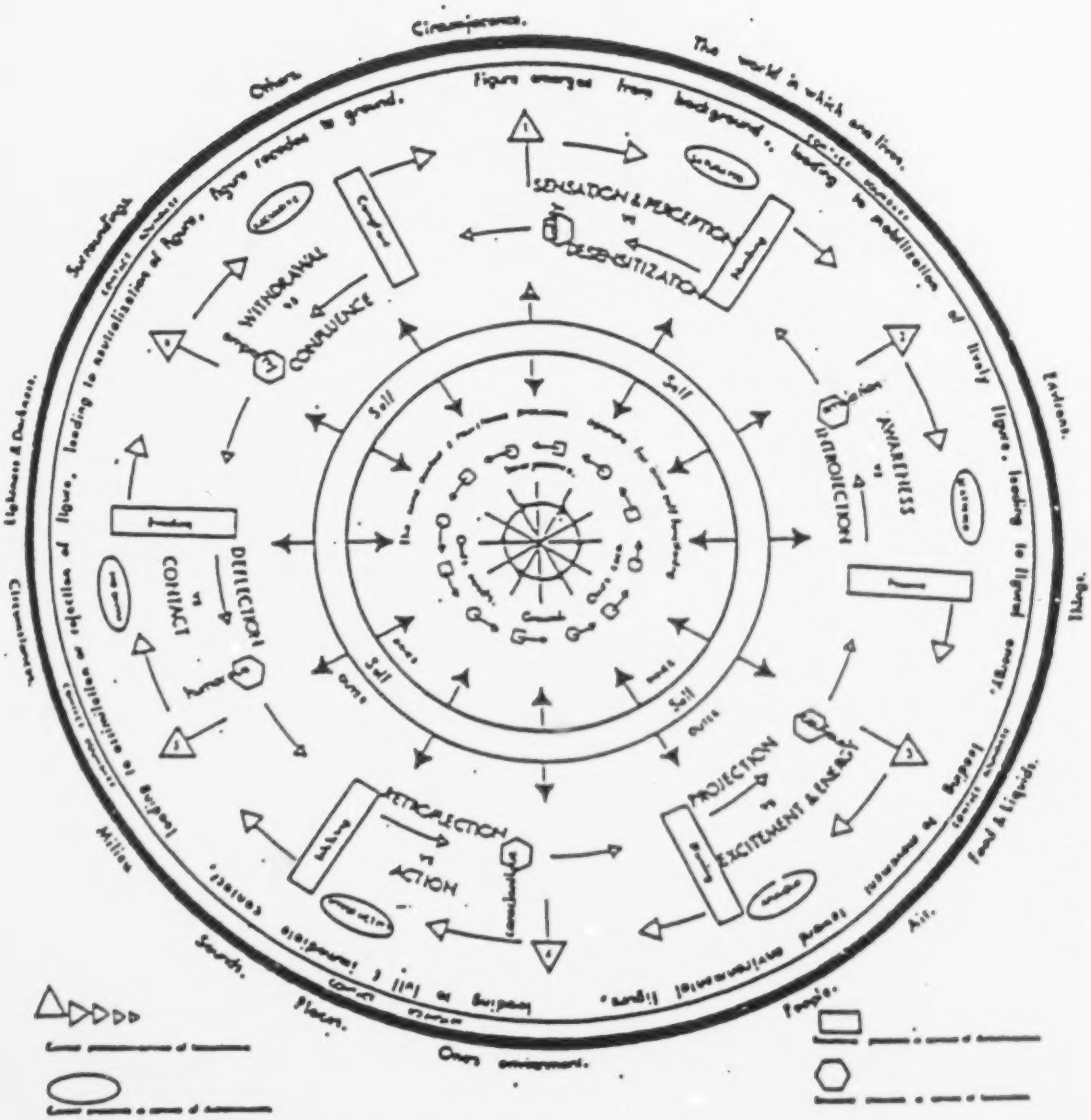

Figure 1. The Gestalt Homeostasis Cycle.